DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 841 FL 021 433

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TITLE Effects of Teaching American Culture on Thai Students' Attitudes toward Thais and Americans.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Horizons: Journal of Asia-Pacific Issures; v3 p8-11 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Foreign Nationals; Higher Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Questionnaires; Second Language Learning; *Second Languages; Statistical Analysis; *Student Attitudes; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS Thailand; *Thai People

ABSTRACT

A study investigated how teaching students of English as a Second Language (ESL) about American culture would affect their attitudes toward both American and their native cultures. Subjects were 61 freshman and sophomore Thai students of English in a Thai university, divided into an experimental group (n=31), which attended a course on American culture, and a control group (n=30). On a questionnaire, the students ranked, in order of importance, 18 values important to Thais. They then rated Thais and Americans on five-point scales with respect to those values. In addition, students in the experimental group were interviewed after the semester. Results indicate that as predicted, attitudes toward the native culture did not change, but attitudes toward the American culture did not improve significantly either, contrary to expectation. It is concluded that while a course such as the one offered may not affect attitudes positively, it may be useful in a second language program if it helps meet students' language needs. Some statistical data are included. (MSE)

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The relationship between learning a second language and learning the culture of native speakers of that language is examined in this article. Specifically, an investigation is reported in which the participants were Thai university students studying English at a university in northern Thailand. The research found no statistically significant changes in students' attitudes toward Thais and Thailand or toward Americans and the U.S. after the students had taken a semester-long course on U.S. culture. Interviews with some of the students in the course are also discussed.

Effects of Teaching American Culture on Thai Students' Attitudes Toward Thais and Americans

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Background

It is widely held in the literature on Second Language Teaching that the culture of the target language is an important part of the curriculum. Fries (1955) writes, "to deal with the culture and life of people is not just an adjunct . . . but an essential feature at every stage of language learning." In the same vein, Chastain (1976, p.383) states, "In the ideal second-language class the teaching of culture is an integral, organized component of the content. Fundamental aspects of the culture are incorporated into the ongoing class activities and included in the tests over the material covered. The students realize that cultural knowledge is one of the basic goals of the course, ..."

There are two reasons commonly mentioned for the importance of teaching culture. First, knowledge of linguistic features of a language is seen as insufficient for learning the language; it must be

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combined with knowledge of the culture of native speakers of that language (Pierson & Fu, 1984; Povey, 1967; Trivedi, 1978). This is true for English, just as for other languages. However, given the role of English as an international language, the teaching of culture to ESL/EFL(English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language) students is more complicated than to students of most other languages. This is because, as Smith (1985) points out, students will need to be able to interact not only with native speakers of English, but also with nonnative speakers, and although the language used is English, nonnative speakers will often be expressing their own cultures. Smith (1985, p.4) writes that, "although language and culture are inextricably tied together, a language is not inextricably tied to a particular culture." From this, Smith concludes that the cultural component of English teaching should give students knowledge of the cultures of nonnative speakers as well as those of native speakers (See also Preston, 1981). The choice of which nonnative cultures to teach can be based on which cultures students are most likely to encounter.

Along similar lines, Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) say that it is possible to be bilingual without being bicultural. They criticize the teaching of native speaker norms and values in EFL situations, calling it socioculturally harmful and pedagogically inefficient. From this, Alptekin and Alptekin urge that EFL teaching materials not be based on native speaker contexts and speak of students learning to respect cultural diversity and becoming not bicultural, but intercultural.

The second reason often cited for teaching the culture of native speaker countries is that such instruction may help develop positive attitudes or, at least, empathy toward native speakers of the target language. These are believed to be important for providing an affective atmosphere conducive to acquisition (Brown, 1980; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; and Oller, Hudson, & Liu 1977). Brown (1980:128) asserts, "It seems clear that the second language learner benefits from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and in all likelihood unsuccessful attainment of proficiency." Brown believes these negative attitudes usually arise "from false stereotyping or from undue ethnocentrism" and that, through instruction about culture, negative attitudes sometimes "*can* be changed, ..." (p.128).

However, in teaching the culture of native speakers, a question arises: Does learning more about the culture of native speakers of the target language lead to a better understanding of and a more positive attitude toward that culture at the expense of causing negative attitudes toward students' own cultures? This question seems especially important when the language being studied is, like English, that of a culture with power and influence worldwide. While creating a more positive attitude toward the culture(s) of native speakers of English may help students to learn English, the creation of negative attitudes toward the students' culture would be seen as undesirable from a sociopolitical standpoint, and evidence shows that it may hinder acquisition of the target language (Oller, Hudson, & Liu, 1977).

James Alatis (1975), long-time executive director of the leading international organization in the field (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), asserts that the role of the teacher of English to speakers of other languages is not and should not be to promote English-speaking cultures at the expense of others. In what, presumably, can be extended to cover EFL as well as ESL, he goes on to say:

> It is surprising to hear people who should know better, accuse teachers of English as a second language of 'linguistic imperialism' and 'cultural aggressiveness'. These accusations are simply not well-founded. Taking the lead from linguists, teachers of English as a second language have always held an 'additive' rather than a 'replacive' philosophy. . . . From the standpoint of culture, this philosophy views cultures as complementary rather than contradictory ways of organizing the social world (p.7).

Regardless of what leaders in the field, textbooks, and courses on language teaching may claim about its additive rather than replacive goals, doubts remain. For example, Liggett (1985, p.2), discussing teaching English in the Arab world, reported that, "Recently a series of front-page articles has appeared in the press of one country arguing that English-language instruction is a guise by which foreigners are trying to weaken the local culture".

One reason that teaching the target language culture could have

replacive rather than additive results is that some teachers may feel that there are ways in which their students' culture(s) would be improved if they were more like that of native speakers of the target language. At the same time, some teachers no doubt think that the culture of native speakers of the target language would benefit by replacements from students' culture(s). Consciously or unconsciously, this replacive view could influence the way the cultural component of language instruction is taught, especially what receives emphasis, and often what is emphasized in the classroom is what is learned. Thus, by influencing what is stressed in class, teachers' opinions could affect what is learned in a course, no matter what their educational philosophy might be or what the instructional materials might say.

Probably more important than the teacher or the materials as determiners of the course's effects are students' initial attitudes and their reasons for studying the target language and the culture of its native speakers. If students begin the course feeling that their own culture is inferior and have the goal of shedding it to take on the culture of native speakers of the target language, a replacive process may occur regardless of the outlook of the teacher and the materials. On the other hand, if the students have an initial additive perspective, the course's effect is likely to follow that process. An extreme example of the later view is shown in what the Chinese head of an institute in China is alleged (he denied it) to have said in an address to an entering class of students: the reason for studying U.S. culture is that it is important to know your enemy.

Mixed results have been reported in previous research into the effects on attitudes of teaching about the culture of other peoples. McFarlane (1945), with a class unconnected to language teaching, and Cooke (1969), with a course on Spanish, found no significant attitude change. However, Clavijo (1984), using a social distance scale, found that the attitudes toward South Americans of U.S. university students studying Spanish became more positive after a course in which culture and language instruction were combined.

The Research

Purpose

I was teaching English at Chiang Mai University in Chiang Mai, Thailand in 1985. The coming semester I was scheduled to teach

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a course on American culture. Teaching the course was my idea; learning more about Americans would help students understand the Americans they met and would also aid comprehension of the U.S. literature they were reading in other classes. Also, I hoped to learn more about my own culture while teaching it to the students. Nevertheless, I was concerned about being a cultural imperialist, furthering what already seemed to be taking place: the penetration of Western culture in Thailand. To attempt to address this concern in a scientific way, I decided to do some research on the question of the effects of the teaching of the target language culture on students' attitude toward both the native and target language cultures. The hypothesis was that attitudes toward the native culture would not change, and that attitudes toward the target language culture would either improve or remain unchanged.

Subjects

Rather than do the research with my own classes, I decided to ask another American teaching at Chiang Mai's other university, Payap University, if the research could be done in her classes; she agreed. The subjects were sixty-one first and second year students. All were Thais. Thirty-one of them were second-year students taking a course, entitled 'Customs and Culture of the English-Speaking World', which was required for all English majors. This was the experimental group and was composed of twenty-four females and seven males.

The control group consisted of twenty-three female and seven male first-year English majors taking an English skills course. The reason for having a control group was that external events of a political, social, or cultural nature could influence students' attitudes. A control group would enable such influence, to some extent, to be taken into account. The reason for choosing this particular class to act as the control was that the same teacher taught both classes. Thus, using this group would also control for variation in the teacher.

Instrument

To measure students' attitudes a two-part (rankings and ratings) questionnaire, in Thai, was developed from a list of values found to be important to Thais (Komin & Smuckarn, 1979). The first part of the questionnaire involved ranking the 18 values in order of importance. In the second part, students rated Thais and then Ameri-

cans on five-point scales. For example, on the value 'Being able to adjust oneself to live in harmony with one's surroundings', students would put 5 if they strongly agreed that Thais had this trait, 4 for agreement, 3 if unsure, 2 for disagreement, and 1 for strong disagreement. The same process was repeated for each of the same values for Americans.

The theoretical basis for the construction of the questionnaire is the expectancy value model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This model states that attitudes toward an object are related to a person's beliefs about that object. There are two ways that beliefs—and through beliefs, attitudes—can be influenced. The first is through direct observation, and the second is through information from an outside source. Two types of beliefs can be influencial: one, the belief that the object has a given attribute, e.g., Thais (object) are friendly (attribute); two, the belief about the attribute, e.g., being friendly is good/important or bad/unimportant.

Procedure

The questionnaire was given to the students by a Thai instructor who assured students that the anonymously completed questionnaire was not connected with the teacher or the students' grades. The questionnaire was given twice, in the second week and again in the final week of the fifteen week semester. In order to gather information which might not be revealed by the questionnaire, after the semester a Thai colleague and I conducted interviews with seven of the students who took the American culture course.

Results

The questionnaires were analyzed in two ways. First, only the rating part of the instrument was used to compare the scores of both the experimental and control groups between the first and second times they completed the questionnaire. As displayed in Table 1, t-tests showed no significant changes in either group's ratings of Thais or Americans. Second, the students' ranking of each of the values was used to weight their rating of the two nationalities for that value. It was hoped that this procedure would give a truer picture of subjects' attitudes, because it would give greater prominence to those values which the students felt were most important. As shown in Table 2, t-tests showed no significant changes between pretest and posttest for either group.

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The reason that the number of people in the experimental and control groups is greater than the number of students in the t-tests is that some questionnaires were completed improperly and could not be included in the data. To determine the reliability of the rating part of the instrument, the KR-20 formula was used. As shown in Table 3, the reliability for the pretests and posttests were .79 or above. (Generally, .80 or above indicates an acceptable degree of reliability.)

Several points emerged from the interviews conducted with students from the American culture class after the semester. First, students who were asked to predict the outcome of the research said they expected attitudes toward Americans to have become more positive and those toward Thais to have remained unchanged. Second, all the students felt the course would be useful to them in their future studies and careers. Third, when asked if they thought it was unfair that many Thais had to study American culture while few Americans studied Thai culture, the general response was that being from a small country, Thais had to accept this fact.

In addition interviewees thought courses on U.S. culture should be continued, although one person felt they would not be appropriate for primary and secondary school students. Another person felt that not teaching about a culture because it might change people's ideas is like saying you cannot trust people with information. On the same issue, another student commented that people are exposed to U.S. culture anyway; a course on it presents a more objective view than students would be likely to get through the media and elsewhere.

Conclusions

The results of this study have limited generalizability to other situations. A course on American culture taught to different students, of different ages, in different countries, in different years, by different teachers might well not have the same results. Furthermore, the questionnaire used in the study was not, knowing what I know now, a state of the art research instrument. Nevertheless, the fact that attitudes toward the native language culture did not significantly change gives some empirical grounds for believing that the culture of English-speaking countries can be taught to learners of English without having a deleterious effect on learners' attitudes toward their

own culture. Also, in the post-course interviews, students favored continuation of the course.

While the results did not show a negative shift in attitudes toward Thai culture, neither did they show a positive shift in attitudes toward American culture. This finding, however, does not mean the course was ineffective, because its main goal was to increase students' knowledge of American culture, not change their attitudes. Also, students already had relatively positive attitudes toward Americans, consistently rating them somewhat above Thais.

My tentative conclusion from the research as well as from my experience teaching American culture is that such a course can be a valuable addition to an English language program, provided that such knowledge will be helpful in meeting students' English language needs. (See Kachru 1988 for a discussion of the use of different varieties of English in different countries and for different needs.) I would like to add, however, that as mentioned earlier, how a course is taught can have an important effect on how it influences students. While this is a topic deserving of its own article, perhaps the key point to make in this regard is that teachers should be as conscious as possible about their own values and those of the materials they use and how these values are reflected in their classroom practice.

Note: This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the 21st Annual International Convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages held in March, 1988 in Chicago, Illinois.

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Table 1

Results of two-tailed t-test comparing pretest and posttest ratings for Thais and Americans by each group of subjects (p .05).

Group	Nationality	Test	n	x	t-value	2-tailed prob.
Exp.	Thai	Pretest	27	68.81	1.60	0.12
		Posttest	27	63.67		
Exp.	American	Pretest	27	70.74	1.96	0.06
		Posttest	27	66.70		
Control	Thai	Pretest	29	63.34	0.62	0.54
		Posttest	29	61.34		
Control	American	Pretest	27	69.85	0.53	0.60
		Posttest	27	68.63		

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Table 2

Results of two-tailed t-test comparing pretest and posttest rating x (times) ranking for Thais and Americans by each group of subjects (p .05).

Group	Nationality	Test	n	x	t-value	2-tailed prob.
Exp.	Thai	Pretest	27	665.81	1.56	0.13
		Posttest	27	612.26		
Exp.	American	Pretest	27	665.81	1.32	0.20
		Posttest	27	635.26		
Control	Thai	Pretest	29	608.83	0.76	0.45
		Posttest	29	584.48		
Control	American	Prestest	27	667.44	0.50	0.63
		Posttest	27	656.00		

Table 3

KR-20 Reliabilities for the rating part of the questionnaire.

Group	Nationality	Test	Reliability coefficient
Exp.	Thai	Pretest	0.93
Exp.	Thai	Posttest	0.84
Exp.	American	Pretest	0.79
Exp.	American	Posttest	0.80
Control	Thai	Pretest	0.90
Control	Thai	Posttest	0.88
Control	American	Pretest	0.80
Control	American	Posttest	0.85

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